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A NOTE ON OLD FRENCH *POR-* IN ENGLISH [1]

By William M. Dey

In *Stud. in Phil.*, XII, 4 (1915), an attempt was made to trace the development of the Latin prefix *pro-* in French. It was shown that, of all the O.F. verbs with the popular form of this prefix (*por-*), only seven came into modern French; and one of these retained the Latin signification of the prefix, while the other six retained its intensive force (*Stud. in Phil.*, XII, 4, p. 167). I propose now to state briefly the history of the Middle English words with this prefix which came from French and which have survived in Modern English, and to compare them with the above-mentioned survivals in Modern French.

The form of the prefix in Middle and in Modern English is usually *pur-*, though occasionally it appears as *por-*, and very rarely as *pour-*. Of the twenty-two O.F. verbs with *por-* having the Latin signification of *forth, out, before,* we find three in Middle English:

(1) *purfilen,* to border, < O.F. *porfiler;*
(2) *purposin,* to propose, purpose, < O.F. *porposer;*
(3) *purtrey* (*-tray, -treie*), to portray, < O.F. *portraire.*

Of the fifty-one O.F. verbs with *por-* having the intensive force (due to a confusion with *par-* < Lat. *per-*), we find four in Middle English:

(1) *purchacen,* to purchase, earn, procure, < O.F. *porchacier;*
(2) *purloynen,* to prolong, retard, delay < O.F. *porloignier;*
(3) *pursuin,* to pursue, prosecute, < O.F. *porsivre* (*-suir*);
(4) *purveien,* to purvey, provide, < O.F. *porveoir.*

All of these verbs [2] have survived in Modern English, with the addition of *purport* for which the Middle English form **purporten* is not attested. Corresponding to the first group, we have (1)

[1] Most of the Middle English words quoted here are taken from Stratmann's *Middle English Dictionary,* edited by H. Bradley, Oxford, 1891. *The Century Dictionary,* The Century Co., N. Y., has also been consulted for many etymologies and definitions.

[2] I include under the verbs such derivatives as verbal substantives, adjectives, adverbs, etc.

purfle, to ornament or decorate with a wrought or flowered border; (2) *purpose,* to propose, intend, design, etc.; cf. *propose,* " of which *purpose* is a doublet. The verb should properly be accented on the last syllable (as in *propose, compose,* etc.), but it has conformed to the noun, which is wholly from the Latin (see *purpose,* noun), whereas the verb (O.F. *porposer*) is partly of different origin (see *pose*) "—Century Dictionary; (3) *portray,* to depict, to depict or describe vividly in words, etc. Corresponding to the second group, we have (1) *purchase,* to gain, obtain, acquire, etc.; (2) *purloin,* to set back or aside, remove, carry off, etc.; (3) *pursue,* to follow, seek, seek to obtain, etc.; (4) *purvey,* to foresee, provide, supply.

It is seen from the foregoing classification that the vitality of the English form of the prefix corresponds closely to that of the French prefix, though the division of the surviving words is different with regard to the meaning of the prefix. Whereas in French the intensive force of *por-* was continued in six of the seven verbs which survived, in English they are quite evenly divided between those with the prefix retaining its Latin signification and those with the prefix assuming the intensive force. The surviving French verbs compounded with *por-* which did not come into English are *pourfendre, pourparler,* and *pourpenser;* the English verbs with *pur-* which show no popular form in French are *purfle, purloin, purpose,* and *purport.*

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